

**NORMAN PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION MINUTES**

JUNE 16, 2016

The Planning Commission of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Study Session in the Study Session Room of the Building A, Conference Room D of the Norman Municipal Complex, 201 West Gray Street, on the 16th day of June 2016 at 6:00 p.m. Notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Norman Municipal Building twenty-four hours prior to the beginning of the meeting and at <http://www.normanok.gov/content/board-agendas>.

Item No. 1, being:

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Chris Lewis called the Study Session to order at 6:00 p.m.

Item No. 2, being:

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT

Roberta Pailes
Erin Williford (arrived at 6:02)
Chris Lewis
Dave Boeck
Tom Knotts
Neil Robinson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Sandy Bahan
Andy Sherrer

A quorum was present.

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Susan Connors, Director, Planning &
Community Development
Leah Messner, Asst. City Attorney
Jane Hudson, Principal Planner
Roné Tromble, Admin. Tech. IV
Terry Floyd, Development Coordinator

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Item No. 3, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING EXISTING DESIGN STANDARDS AND POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AND ADDITIONAL DESIGN STANDARDS FOR RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

ITEMS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD:

1. Excerpts from the Zoning Ordinance:
 - Sec. 431.4 – Exterior Appearance
 - Sec. 431.6 – Commercial Outdoor Lighting Standards
 - Sec. 431.9 – Fencing, Walls, and Screening
 - Sec. 431.8 – Landscaping Requirements for Off-Street Parking Facilities

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Boeck – Having practiced architecture in Norman since 1981, one of the issues that I've always thought about is we have our historic neighborhoods that have real stringent regulations as to what you can do to houses in the neighborhood, but we have lots of other neighborhoods, like the Campus Corner area, that are not historic neighborhoods, that have had some fairly historic context that we've watched disappear over the last couple years. I asked – back then, Dave Clark was the head of Planning. I said, "why can't we have some design standards?" He said, "well, we'd get sued and we don't want to get sued." I said, "how does Santa Fe?" Well, they have special conditions because they're a very historic community. I said, "why can't we be an historic community?" So that was that conversation. That was 30 years ago – 25 years ago. So that's what brought it up again is just watching, one-by-one, some nice little arts and crafts or bungalow style houses being torn down and these really plain vanilla duplexes going up that seem to ignore any sense of design standards. I feel that Norman is above that – that we can save even our non-historic neighborhoods. So that's why I asked what we could do to develop some kind of design standards.

One of my thoughts is I've talked to people that have bought lots in different neighborhoods in Oklahoma City – some are historic; some are not historic – but these neighborhoods Oklahoma City has instilled design review committees that review plans for specific houses and are real specific about the guidelines that they had in the neighborhoods as to what can go in there.

Mr. Knotts – Are these review committees in historic areas?

Mr. Boeck – Kind of regional or district areas, best I can tell. I've never really looked at it seriously. I know Crown Heights is an historic neighborhood. Paseo is an historic neighborhood. But there are some districts in the near east side around Shartell and Classen, or Classen and Western and like 6th, 7th and 8th Street where a lot of stuff had disappeared a long time ago, but there were a few houses left and they're still pretty stringent about the guidelines – it's more of scale and stuff like that, because some of the stuff that's going in is very contemporary, but its scaling fits in with the neighborhood and has some really nice design elements, as opposed to just plain vanilla wrappers. Apparently these committees are really stringent, real hard to work with. They have architects on them. Sometimes you have to go back and redesign your facility if you want to build it in the neighborhood. And I like that.

Mr. Knotts – So they have actual teeth? I mean these committees. So do you know how they're organized?

Mr. Boeck – They're made up of citizens from around town. I don't know if it's the Planning Department that puts them together. They have certain numbers of ...

Mr. Knotts – Not just the neighborhood?

Mr. Boeck – Not just the neighborhood. It's not just people from the neighborhood. There are people from the neighborhood, but they'll also have an architect, an engineer, a developer, a planner, a builder. I don't know all the details. I just have heard the kind of stuff that they review and how they review it and how sometimes you have to go back, and these have to be approved before they go to the City for a building permit. They can't even go for a building permit unless they go through the design review committees and get approved there.

Mr. Lewis – Susan, do we have any historic neighborhoods in Norman?

Ms. Connors – We have two. We have the Chautauqua neighborhood and the Miller neighborhood.

Mr. Boeck – And then we have two that are working on becoming historic neighborhoods?

Ms. Connors – I only know of one. In another area, they are just doing a survey of that area – just like we did over on Timberdell -- to capture at this moment in time that architecture and the fact that it's historic, because now those houses are 50 years old, and are of a certain type. But that will probably never be an historic district.

Mr. Lewis – So my understanding, then, is that a preservation district, that you're speaking of, would be more like an overlay district?

Ms. Connors – The historic districts are overlay districts, and there's a whole set of design guidelines. But, of course, they have to be historic to become an historic district. There has to be a percentage of homes – and City Council has to approve an historic district.

Mr. Lewis – Do historic districts already have preservation standards in them?

Ms. Connors – No. Once the overlay zone is put on them, because it's through the overlay zone that the design standards are required. Any changes to those homes go through the Historic District Commission.

Mr. Lewis – So if there is an overlay or historic district already present, then there's already design standards that ...

Mr. Boeck – That's why I said that at the start, that we already have that with historic neighborhoods. I've been on the Historic District Commission and I've been in front of the Historic District Commission. There are strict guidelines in terms of how you interpret

that in terms of what you do to your houses or what you even build in the neighborhood. But what I'm talking about is areas that could be interesting – because they might not have enough houses or enough people to create a historic neighborhood, they still have context of history and historical context in design form that, in my opinion, need to be protected somehow.

Mr. Robinson – When I was working in Columbus, Ohio area with some developments for a hotel developer, we came across this kind of thing, not just in historic districts, which they had a couple of those especially around The Ohio State University. Also in the other areas of town, there were these other levels of review before you got to Planning Commission, that basically were, as Dave is describing, committees that were established to review projects of pretty much any type, but from single family homes to multi-family, commercial, et cetera. The purpose being that the Planning Commission was essentially the step where you got all your building permit items out of the way. It was a much more Planning and Zoning type arrangement. The architectural issues were related to the aesthetics of the particular areas, and they weren't related to an historic district, as they just were about the general developed character of the neighborhoods that they were in. So that if you had an area that had been developed in, say, the mid-50s or late-60s, it had a particular ambience about it, and what they were looking for was that somebody wasn't going to come in and build a 4-square, 8-story concrete high-rise on a piece of property. They would review your plans. The hotels that we were doing – the architects made some modifications to the facades to kind of make it blend in more with the local neighborhood. But it was less rigorous than you would face against the Historic District Commission, but it was sort of a balancing act of what the community on a small scale wanted and what the community on a large scale wanted. Because the whole general idea was everybody was in favor of economic development. We were bringing in hotels, et cetera – business. But then they also didn't want to be building hotels in neighborhoods where they didn't think they belonged, or where they would just stick out like a sore thumb and not really fit in. So I think that's kind of ...

Mr. Knotts – Do you know how those were structured?

Mr. Robinson – As I recall, there were community members and they tended to be people that had a stake, like there would be a banker, perhaps what you'd call a developer basically, someone who actually owned developable property in the area. On the one that sat on the Candlewood Hotel we worked on, there was a State official who worked for the State government, but that wasn't related to his job there; he just happened to work for the State government. They were looking for people like engineers, architects, people with construction expertise, things like that, who could give input about the architecture and the appearance. Another step that we ran into at the time was also there was an economist. We had to produce an economic analysis – it was a commercial property, so we had to develop an economic analysis of the project that would show that it was economically viable for some period of time, and then what would happen if it were to close. That was kind of a separate step from the review committee. So it was a broad spectrum kind of group. There were obviously City staff there, but I got the feeling that it wasn't City Council or anything like that. It

was an appointed group, but it was not like an official – and their recommendations were recommendations.

Mr. Knotts – Do you know if that group oversaw how large an area?

Mr. Robinson – They had several of them. Columbus is, of course, quite a bit larger than Norman. So there were areas of town – one of the areas we were in was almost a rural East Norman kind of thing, and that group was entirely different from the group where we were closer in in a semi-industrial development area. So there were at least two different groups. I don't know if there were any more or not; I wasn't aware of it. I just presumed at the time that they had different groups for different areas of town, but I couldn't swear to that.

Mr. Knotts – Do you have a feel for, in those two individual groups, what the ratio of appointed – I mean, I guess they were all appointed, but the citizenry of that area was represented?

Mr. Robinson – I don't.

Mr. Lewis – I know you said it was a volunteer group, or you thought it was. I assume that you worked with the Planning Department of the city.

Mr. Robinson – When you go in with your development plans, like here we have the Pre-Development meeting. It's kind of you go in and you have what would be their pre-development meeting and they direct you through the steps. They say first you need to do this and you need a site plan, and they tell you what you need and then lead you through the process.

Mr. Lewis – I was wondering if you had any relationship still with the city and the Planning Department.

Mr. Robinson – Oh, no. This was 1990.

Mr. Boeck – I think it would be real easy to just talk to Oklahoma City. They're doing the same thing up there.

Ms. Connors – Terry pulled this up. They have a downtown design district, Bricktown, Stockyard City urban design district. They have the river scenic overlay district. Then they have overlay districts for the Asian district, Paseo, Capitol Hill, and then North 23rd Street corridor. We can do some research through these links to see what you have to do to do that.

Ms. Pailles – Where I worked before we were battered into submission for planning with a two-step process. One was clearly delineating your goal and then talking about objectives. We've gone straight to objectives, which is how you accomplish – committees, boundary setting. So could we kind of return to the goal and clearly state that to see if everyone agrees? Everybody kind of went directly to how you do it. I

mean, the goal is to preserve architecturally or aesthetically important areas through design standards.

Mr. Boeck – Well put.

Ms. Pailles – Are we all kind of in agreement with that? How about the Planning staff – does that seem like a normal sort of planning goal?

Ms. Connors – Well, it is. We're all talking about residential, so I don't know if you want to include residential and commercial. They're a little bit different. There's lots of ways to go about this. You don't have to have all these committees. You can have design standards that you get adopted into the zoning code.

Ms. Pailles – Yeah, well, that's all objectives. But I mean as a goal, is that a sensible goal in terms of Planning?

Ms. Connors – Sure.

Mr. Lewis – It sounds like, if Oklahoma City already has some of these types of things in place, and it sounds like they're going to be overlay districts, instead of recreating the wheel, it might behoove us to think about the items that we want to discuss tonight and the sake of time and the staff has been here since 8:00 this morning – is to get those documents in hand, give us all a chance to review those, and then meet back at another time once we have the knowledge in place.

Mr. Boeck – I was talking residential, but Oklahoma City's districts include commercial and residential. To me, that's kind of more holistic approach, because Campus Corner is not just residential; it's not just commercial – it's both.

Ms. Messner – We can certainly pull Lawrence, Kansas and see what they're doing, and Columbus. We can pull some other college towns and maybe get a survey of options to look at.

Mr. Boeck – That would be wonderful.

Ms. Pailles – I would suggest the University of Minnesota, because they actually have a Dinky Town – they call it Dinky Town. It looks just like Campus Corner.

Ms. Messner – We usually survey our Big 12 schools and a few others so, yeah, we can ...

Mr. Lewis – It sounds like everybody has a unique interest in it and what we're trying to do is preserve what they did to Oklahoma City back almost 80 years ago when they wiped out all the old architectural buildings and now all we have is square high-rises. So we're trying to be proactive in the City of Norman, whether that's residential or commercial.

Mr. Boeck – I guess what's disturbing to me the most is that – and I understand our policies and our programs and zoning and building. We don't have teeth to say, no,

these two units sitting next to each other have to look differently. So you can build eight or ten of them. All we can do is – they submit a building permit set and if it meets the zoning as far as parking and building heights and stuff like that, then we have to approve it. So I've been watching stuff in Oklahoma City and I see some really what I'd call interesting architectural stuff going on that's very creative, it's very – what's the term? – diverse. So it seems to be working.

Ms. Messner – Are there other areas of town you all are interested in? I know you mentioned the area around Campus. Oklahoma City has a whole bunch. Are there other areas – so when we're thinking of examples, we can be thinking of parts of town you're interested in?

Mr. Boeck – In my mind, the area east of Porter and west of Central State Hospital – that whole original township. It's pretty much zoned R-2. There is some real interesting and I'd call it traditional arts and crafts or bungalow style architecture there. It's not an historic neighborhood. I've seen things get torn down there and stuff going up that, again, looks very vanilla. So that would be an area in my mind that would be worth protecting or having some kind of input as to what goes back in there.

Ms. Pailles – And whatever the process is, it would be good if there was an opening for a neighborhood to initiate acquiring this designation for themselves – so like Timberdell neighbors could apply for whatever this is – an overlay district – a boundary, or whatever. So that there's some way for it to percolate up from the bottom as well as come down from what we think of.

Mr. Knotts – East of Berry, from Robinson to Imhoff, is diverse north and south, but it has a kind of a character of not University, but not Brookhaven.

Mr. Lewis – Also have the area west of the University – Chautauqua and Lahoma and all that area.

Mr. Knotts – You're right, but I was trying to set a limit and go east of that.

Ms. Pailles – Boundary setting would be a big discussion.

Mr. Boeck – You have certain parts of town that were developed at certain time periods. When you get north of Lindsey and west of Berry Road and south of Main Street, there's a really unique style of residential architecture in that area that's very – it's period and it's got a unique form to it – a unique style to it. I think it's kind of interesting.

Mr. Lewis – So let me just throw a comment out, that what I'm hearing to allow this to be driven from the bottom up, as opposed to forcing the top down – as well. So why are we confining it to a certain area of Norman? What if there was a brand new development that had a unique characteristic or style within it – such as let's just say, for instance, maybe it would apply or wouldn't – but let's say University development out where Target – that all has a unique design standard, and I believe that standard is already in place, but if that were an area? University North Park. So, if you have a

development like that that somebody has used continuity in, I mean, why wouldn't that overlay district – or that area qualify just as much as ...

Mr. Knotts – No disqualification here. There was a question about well, what areas?

Mr. Lewis – I'm saying all areas, then. Why would be exclude any area, if the opportunity is there to utilize it?

Ms. Messner – We can look at what people are doing for raw land.

Mr. Robinson – Does the North Park thing have its own architectural review committee?

Ms. Connors – And they have design standards.

Mr. Robinson – If a developer wants to come in and he's got 160 acres and he wants to develop in a particular style and create his own architectural – I guess you kind of do that with a PUD.

Mr. Boeck – I think University North Park is a successful example of what you can do when you've got design standards that set a limit as to what you can do. I mean, Verizon Bank is totally different than a lot of the other buildings there, but it still fits in because of the scale of the buildings and some of the detailing and stuff like that.

Mr. Lewis – Very successful example. And that's what made me think of – why just look at certain areas and why not all of them?

Mr. Boeck – Well, the area that I'm most interested in, and I was the one that spoke up. But, you're right. All the areas of town.

Ms. Pailes – It's the older neighborhoods, because those are where the houses are coming down.

Ms. Messner – And they don't have covenants that control what can be built.

Mr. Lewis – Just as a reminder, I think one of the reasons this topic even came up was because on Campus Corner and that area there were some older homes that were absolutely being destroyed and these square cracker box apartment units going up that are not even harmonious with the neighborhood.

Mr. Boeck – It's not just something that's unique to this time period. There are areas around town that obviously in the 60s someone tore down some units, put in some duplexes, four-plexes that were very simple, because they didn't cost very much, and so they sit there, and they're still kind of an eyesore in the neighborhood, even though they might be historic because of when they were built, but they have no context with where they were done. So that's happened and will continue to happen unless we can address it in a positive way.

Mr. Lewis – Let me throw out something. If we have an overlay, let's just say in a Campus Corner type area, where many of the homes are older bungalow – 20s, 30s, 40s maybe in that neighborhood – and through the years, maybe back in the 60s, 70s a house got torn down that a square cracker box duplex got put in, and let's say in 20 years that duplex comes in disrepair and has to be torn down, then my question is going to be, with your thoughts in mind, are we looking at something that would say, okay, for this lot then that lot has to conform back to the harmony of the area in a bungalow style?

Ms. Connors – It would depend on the zoning what structures are allowed under the zoning, and then if there were design guidelines in place and the building was taken down and a new building would have to meet those design standards. It doesn't necessarily mean it would be a bungalow. It would just have to meet the design standards.

Mr. Lewis – The overlay design standards of that area.

Ms. Connors – And what the zoning allows. If the zoning allowed an apartment building, they could do it, but there would still be design standards.

Ms. Pailles – So you wouldn't have to replace it with another 60s building. It would revert to whatever design standards.

Mr. Boeck – And, of course, do we want to put in what's unique about historic neighborhoods is those houses that are there in a particular style were designed at that time to be that particular style. To replicate that today may be kind of falsifying something. So that's where like what's going on at 6th, 7th, and 8th Street and Classen in Oklahoma City, where they're allowing some really contemporary urban loft style houses, or something more of today's style, but they're in the context and the scale of the old houses in the neighborhood, which adds kind of a texture of a diversity in that neighborhood. So to say that they all have to be arts and crafts is, I think, kind of fake, but I think the standards can be developed to allow for diversity in a tasteful way.

Mr. Lewis – That's really what I was asking. I had seen those houses, and while they're completely different, they do fit in really well.

Ms. Pailles – When we first got here, everywhere recently built had a mansard roof. I think we can skip that period; we don't need to replicate that.

Mr. Boeck – There was a whole decade where design went away – it just went away and we built some really ugly stuff. Diagonal siding and mansards. Where did that come from? Of course, the French built mansards, but it was a totally different context.

Mr. Knotts – So if we were going forward with this, what would the process be?

Ms. Connors – We have quite a ways to go. We need to decide – I guess, I'm hearing mostly that you want to look at overlay districts, rather than creating design standards

in the zoning code. If you created an overlay district, we'll need to do some research about, because then every district might be different.

Mr. Robinson – If you created something within the zoning code itself, could you do it to address those differences between different areas of town?

Ms. Connors – Well, not as much as we're talking about here, I don't think. It's easier to do commercial, I think – commercial design standards can be pretty uniform to really get at masonry and landscape and setbacks and things like that – and parking arrangement. I think that becomes more universal. But what I'm hearing here is we want to really speak to the different areas of Norman and what they look like now, or what they kind of were built as, and how to maintain that character.

Mr. Robinson – So we would need to define those areas, really, in a way.

Mr. Boeck – Well, that would be a start, is to define districts.

Ms. Pailles – Or at least define the process for creating them.

Ms. Connors – I think one of the first things we would need to do is kind of pull this together as to what you really want to do and get a concept, and then we'd need to take it to City Council to see if they are willing to move forward with this. I mean, if they want staff to pursue this. So some kind of study session to say we have this great idea and we'd like to move forward with it, and they can say that's a great idea.

Ms. Pailles – That's why I was trying to articulate the goal so you can say to Council, "Here's the goal. Do you feel this is a legitimate goal?"

Mr. Boeck – I think one of the things, like in the overlay district, the Core Norman, we spend a lot of time looking at different types of projects in different places that represented what we were trying to talk about for different zones in this district, which visually, I think, helped people understand what we were trying to talk about. I think the conversation we had earlier about looking at Lawrence, looking at Oklahoma City, and kind of having – we call it precedent studies. Who's done it, how they've done it, what it's accomplished, and how that relates to what we're trying to accomplish, would be a great thing to present to City Council.

Ms. Connors – I just want to remind you we still have the Center City Form Based Code that is moving forward slowly, but it's moving forward. If that gets approved at some point, that will be a part of what you're talking about. That's a 42-block area between downtown and Campus Corner, and from about University over to the railroad.

Mr. Robinson – Is that also an overlay district?

Ms. Connors – Right now it is. Maybe.

Mr. Boeck – One of things that's being discussed, and I think it hasn't been answered yet, is whether it's going to be voluntary or whether it's going to be required.

Ms. Connors – Well, it has been decided, but not everybody agrees with it. The Steering Committee is still working through this. Council has not seen this.

Ms. Messner – It's subject to change.

Mr. Lewis – It sounds like there would be – and just summarizing. The overall intent of our conversation is preservation.

Mr. Boeck – No, it's not. That's not the term I would use. Because the last conversation we had before this we were talking about 6th, 7th, and 8th Street in Oklahoma City where they didn't try to preserve the style of the two or three houses that were left. They actually allowed for a different vernacular. It was about scale. So it's not so much about preservation – part of it's about preservation, in terms of scale, but part of it is diversity – is more the term that I would use – creating a context for diversity, rather than uniformity.

Ms. Williford – What did you say? Continuity. They can be different, but you're not going to have a six-story apartment next to a tiny little bungalow.

Mr. Boeck – Right. Continuity, I guess, is a good word.

Ms. Pailes – Neighborhood coherence or something. And part of coherence in those older neighborhoods is the landscaping. Can that be addressed, included?

Ms. Connors – Yes, it can. That's in the public realm, so you're identifying both private and public realm then, particularly in older neighborhoods, because there's just not big enough lots to make the lots do a lot of landscaping. It has to be part of the public realm – the sidewalk and the streetscape.

Mr. Lewis – So it sounds like we're all moving in the same direction. So I think our charge right now is to send something to City Council as a question, are you interested in this?

Ms. Connors – Oh, no, no, no, no. You need to have your whole idea. You need to know more information – like we were talking about getting from these other cities.

Mr. Lewis – Exactly. That's exactly what I'm saying. So, at this point, it seems like we're spinning our wheels a little bit until we get the design standards from other cities, like Oklahoma City, Ohio, Minnesota and those types of places, and then we can come back together and discuss more what our overall goal is and then we can move forward from that point. Does that sound reasonable? We'll adjourn in just a second, but how about we just say maybe we can take this topic back up at another time in the future, once we have those pamphlets and things in place? Because we don't know if that's going to take a week or two weeks or a month or what.

Ms. Connors – It's going to be a little bit of time because we've got the Center City going and the Comprehensive Plan starting and I only have staff members to work on this.

Mr. Boeck – So will you be willing to say, if any of us wanted to take the initiative and start searching that information out on our own ...

Ms. Connors – Absolutely.

Ms. Messner – Send it to staff.

Mr. Lewis – So, with that in mind, suggestions on how to move forward from a staff perspective, because staff always has recommendations.

Ms. Connors – Well, I was thinking that you wanted to head in the direction of design standards in the zoning code, so I really need to recollect my thoughts and do some research. Obviously we need to try and focus on overlay districts and look at cities that have those, I think, rather than incorporated design standards in the zoning code or subdivision ordinance.

Ms. Pailles – Is that somewhat simpler to approach it through overlays?

Ms. Connors – No. The other would be simpler. Because you would only have one standard.

Mr. Lewis – Well, in this situation, that wouldn't work if you had different ...

Mr. Boeck – Well, it could. I don't know. I haven't thought it through that much. That's where looking at how different cities have done it, because I don't know what Oklahoma City has done overlay districts or if they've got one central zoning design standard.

Ms. Connors – Well, they've got a lot of districts. I didn't have time to get into the nitty-gritty. But there are a lot of districts. With that many districts, I don't know how many commissions they have. Keep in mind, there's only so many boards and commissions that we can staff and keep going. I don't know how they do it, either, so that would be something to look into.


Mr. Lewis – So it sounds like it's been a very productive meeting. We'll wait for staff to collect the information and then we'll reconvene back at the suggestion of staff.

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Item No. 4, being:

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the study session adjourned at 6:38 p.m.



Norman Planning Commission